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March 12, 1960

Dear Selwyn:

We have now concluded our talks with Dr. Adenauer and Herr von Bismarck and I would like to give you a brief account of the discussions at the White House and here in the State Department. Except for the Chancellor's proposal for a plebiscite in West Berlin (which I shall comment on later) the visit produced no surprises. The range of subjects covered is fairly accurately reflected in the joint statement which was issued after the meeting of the President and the Chancellor at the White House.

As you might expect, the Chancellor both publicly and privately emphasized the importance he attached to the disarmament question. He thinks that the Heads of Government must do everything in their power to make progress in this field. He plainly does not think we can rely on the Two-Power Group at Geneva to make the progress he considers necessary. We can all certainly agree that the topic is of paramount importance.

The Chancellor, laying stress on the unity of the German political parties on the Berlin and German questions, reiterated his willingness to back up the firmness of the German position with their willingness to face the dangerous consequences which such an attitude might force us to face. For our part, we developed two points in response. The first was that we did not intend to withdraw American forces from Europe until substantial progress has been achieved toward a workable disarmament program. Until that occurs we would not even discuss the matter. The second was that the American flag would be flying over Berlin as long as present conditions continued and no agreement acceptable to the Federal Republic and West Berlin had been concluded. At the same time we have been stressing to the Germans that starting from this basis, it should be possible to consider realistically the various alternatives open to the West.

The Right Honorable  
Selwyn Lloyd, C. B. E., T. D., G. C., M. P.,  
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs,  
London.



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The Chancellor's public proposal for a plebiscite in West Berlin not only caught us by surprise; it was a new idea to his entourage and his Embassy here. Since he made the proposal the Germans have been having second thoughts. They are now thinking in terms not of a plebiscite to be conducted by us, but rather by the political parties in Berlin. This would make the plebiscite a less formal measure, with fewer juridical overtones, and have the advantage that it could more easily be arranged before the Summit meeting takes place. That method would also avoid prejudging the modalities of a possible plebiscite in East Germany.

We have taken no position on the plebiscite idea. Even in its modified form we can see certain disadvantages which need to be carefully weighed. First off, the question to be put in a plebiscite would have to be very carefully formulated indeed. Secondly, while we have little doubt on this score, there is always the possibility that the plebiscite result might be less than overwhelming on our side. But most dangerous of all is the implication that the results of the plebiscite are designed as a form of pressure on us, rather than the Soviets, that it somehow gives us less freedom of action than we might otherwise have. Finally, a plebiscite conducted on the Western side might harm the public acceptability of future possible proposals on our side for plebiscites in East Germany and East Berlin. In any case, we expect the Germans to lay their proposal before us in the Four Power Working Group on Germany and Berlin, where we can all have a go at the advantages and disadvantages of the idea.

We discussed General Norstad's plan for a zone of inspection with the Chancellor a bit and then had longer talks on this subject with Herr von Brentano. The Germans advanced their usual line on the undesirability of proposing plans to the Soviets which covered limited zones, since these tend to lead to the neutralization in a political, as well as a military sense, of the area covered.

After considerable discussion, Brentano was at least able to agree that it would be a good idea to consult General Norstad on the military value of a zone of inspection. Once we have an appraisal from him, the Germans will have a basis on which to provide their own military comments. I think this represents a measure of progress in getting

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forward with the idea, although one cannot be too optimistic considering the firmness of the German position. Von Brentano made quite clear that the Germans would oppose any zone limited to a European area constituted principally by Germany. We agreed that it was very especially necessary to avoid any leak to the effect that this idea was even being considered.

We told Brentano we had no fixed ideas on the area which should be included in the zone of inspection although we always included Alaska and a portion of Siberia in the discussions. We also told him that we are interested primarily in safeguards against surprise attack and the defense of Europe. The Soviets are not likely to accept any proposal we make, but it will provide a good test of whether they are interested in inspection zones. After General Norstad's comments are available, we think this problem might be canvassed in the Four Power Working Group on Germany and Berlin.

You will, of course, be getting further details of our talks through the regular channels. I have only tried to mention in this letter what seemed to me to be the highlights. As you can see, the talks, while certainly useful, produced no particular new developments in connection with our Summit preparations.

With warmest personal regards,

Most sincerely,



Christian A. Herter

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Cleared: EUR - Mr. Kohler

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